

# La. House ponders new Shreveport district

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**BATON ROUGE** — House members could learn this week about a plan to create a new district aimed at electing another black representative from Shreveport.

The idea is controversial among sitting representatives and their constituents.

A proposal from Speaker Jim Tucker, R-Terrytown, to overhaul election boundaries based on the latest census doesn't include a new majority minority district in Shreveport.

But Rep. Rick Gallot suggested Monday that he will file a bill to change that.

"If we want to stand the best chance of pre-clearance, I think we've got to comply with federal law," said Gallot, D-Ruston. He said it might not be popular, but "I don't think popularity is the law."

Louisiana is among states with political subdivisions that must receive Department of Justice approval because of its history of racial discrimination.

Rep. Barbara Norton, D-Shreveport, represents one of three districts in the city where black voters outnumber whites. She's a member of the Louisiana Legislative Black Caucus, which has a goal of electing more black members to the state Legislature and Congress.

Norton doesn't want a new district to happen at the cost of weakening existing majority black districts — or making it easier for voters to elect a white representative.

"If you're going to do a fourth one, you do whatever you need to do," Norton said. "But don't do it with chopping my district up."

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Shreveport-area representatives' take on Gallot's plan would include splitting Shreveport's Southern Hills neighborhood between Norton's district and a new one represented by a minority. That would pull constituents from Rep. Richie Burford, R-Stonewall, and Rep. Alan Seabaugh, R-Shreveport.

Seabaugh was sworn in Sunday after a fall special election. His southeast Shreveport home, he said, wasn't even in the district he was elected to represent under one version of Gallot's remap.

He said he will work to keep Southern Hills out of a minority district, and that he wouldn't want to campaign against another incumbent.

"As far as representing my constituents, they don't want it," Seabaugh said. "And I'd rather not run against Richie."

During a meeting of the House and Governmental Affairs Committee on Monday, representatives ticked off a list of about 10 Shreveporters who oppose moving Southern Hills into a minority district.

Form letters and emails sent to Tucker, Seabaugh and Burford pointed out Caddo Parish is majority white and that its representative districts should reflect that.

"Southern Hills is a large, but very close community that has played a significant role in the development of Shreveport from an economic, cultural and political perspective," Betty Dianne Thompson said. "The inclusion of Southern Hills in a minority district would potentially strip it of its identity."

Most discussion from the committee focused on south Louisiana. Rep. Jane Smith, R-Bossier City, asked Tucker to talk about northwest Louisiana. But he had little to offer.

"I don't know that I'm ready to talk about it in detail like I know where we are on the Orleans side," Tucker said.

That meeting was a part of an ongoing special legislative session focused solely on redistricting. It kicked off Sunday and will continue through April 13.

Besides the House of Representatives, lines will be redrawn for Congress, the state Senate, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Public Service Commission and, possibly, the Supreme Court and courts of appeal.